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“SAFE SCHOOLS -- SAFE COMMUNITIES”

**PREPARED REMARKS OF ATTORNEY GENERAL J.B. VAN HOLLEN
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Let me start by thanking the Wisconsin Association of School Boards, the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators, and the Wisconsin Association for School Business Officials for hosting this remarkable convention. I know that in law enforcement, the opportunity to exchange ideas with peers, partners, and stakeholders is critical to establishing best practices and providing the best public service possible. I am sure that the field of education is no different. I've seen this convention's impressive itinerary, and there are certainly plenty of opportunities to learn and share ideas. Thank you for letting me be a part of that.

So what is the state's top cop doing at an education convention?

As you know, schools are not islands separate from society. They are integral parts of communities. Unfortunately, the public safety issues that plague communities are present and sometimes intensified at schools. Wisconsin's schoolchildren are targets for sex predators. Schools can be marketplaces for illicit drugs; children, buyers and sellers. High school and even middle school campuses can be recruiting grounds for gangs. Rarely, but not rarely enough, school campuses are stages for horrific acts of violence, as exemplified by Columbine, Virginia Tech, Weston, and what was narrowly averted at Green Bay East.

That's why I believe that what we do in law enforcement is not just important, but essential to the proper functioning of schools. I'm not alone in that view. About two months ago, UW-Madison's new Chancellor, Biddy Martin, was asked by a reporter from the Associated Press what jobs she deemed essential given the directive that Chancellor's hire only those positions deemed "essential to the University's mission." Her response? Those jobs involving public safety, specifically University Police. And while school districts don't have police departments, they have the same safety concerns as Universities for the same reason: Violence and crime at school can undermine the education of all students. To borrow the motto of the Milwaukee School District's Public Safety Division, "Education first, safety always."

I am acutely aware that when it comes to school safety, schools and school districts are on the front lines. The policies and procedures school districts and school administrators put into place can have a dramatic impact on the safety of kids and teachers. The right policies can help you

identify problems before they manifest; can help you interact with law enforcement in a way that law enforcement can best help you, and can help your students avoid becoming victims of crime.

It is because so much can be done at the school district and school administration level that I am particularly glad that I was invited to say a few words *and* offered the opportunity to make staff available to go into some subject areas with more depth and hopefully have the opportunity to interact with you.

At the Department of Justice, we have spent considerable time involved with issues that relate to protecting children and school safety. Since I became Attorney General, I've expanded our Internet Crimes Against Children program to take more child sex predators off the streets. We've published an updated Safe Schools Legal Resource Manual to help school officials and others navigate the many legal issues that relate to school safety. I participated in a Task Force with State Attorneys General from throughout the nation to study school and campus violence. I have also heard from school officials at my annual Law Enforcement Summit, and as I travel the state visiting with law enforcement and community leaders in each county. Most recently, I developed a legislative proposal to facilitate greater information-sharing between schools and law enforcement.

Much of this work suggests that there are a number of strategies that can help your school districts – and the kids your school districts serve – be safer. Today, I want to focus on three. To varying degrees, many of your school districts are doing some or all of these things. But I hope that all of you evaluate whether you can enhance what you are doing.

1. Teach Internet Safety

My first recommendation is my only one that is driven at curriculum: *Teach Internet Safety*.

As Attorney General, I have the privilege of speaking before a variety of groups. Almost without fail, so long as I've introduced it into the discussion, the issue that generates the most discussion and concern is the problem of Internet Crimes Against Children.

Why? Because online sexual exploitation of our children is one of the most pervasive and damaging crimes of our modern era. The numbers don't lie:

In the first 9 and a half months of last year – and this is a conservative number based on law enforcement observations – 22,304 unique IP addresses were identified as attempting to download child pornography. Let that sink in. 22,000 computers representing nearly as many users are using their computers to download images and movies of children being sexually assaulted.

Studies have shown that most child pornography offenders possess images of pre-pubescent children. Those studies indicate that the vast majority of the child pornography possessed by convicted offenders includes graphic depictions of sexual penetration. Studies have also indicated a strong correlation between possession of child pornography and the offender sexually victimizing children.

Not only is child pornography pervasive, but children are commonly exposed to sexual content and online predators. Most youth have encountered graphic images depicting sexual contact on the Internet. While online, approximately 1 in 7 kids are requested by an adult to engage in sexual activities or sexual talk. Almost a third of these contacts are aggressive, meaning that the online predator made or attempted to make contact with the youth online.

Tragically, while the Internet has revolutionized the way we gather information and interact, it has also revolutionized the way sexual predators interact with children.

At the Department of Justice, we can react to criminal behavior. We've arrested well over 500 online sex offenders since the program was initiated, and I've expanded our Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force.

But reacting is only a part of the equation. Teaching children about the Internet's dangers and how to use the Internet safely is another very important part of the equation, one that parents, educators, and law enforcement bear some responsibility. Last year, our Internet Crimes Against Children Task Force made 314 community presentations, some associated with schools. We are looking for ways to build on this in the future – hopefully with some of you.

School districts, too, should educate kids about Internet safety. While I do not advocate a statewide curriculum mandate because I truly believe that local school boards are in the best position to prescribe their schools' curriculum pupils in their district receive, I also believe that when presented with these disturbing facts, each and every Wisconsin school district should choose to incorporate Internet Safety in the curriculum.

Modules have been developed for this purpose. Smaller-scale modules are available without charge. For example, one resource is the Netsmartz Workshop, which provides an interactive educational Internet safety program. At Netsmartz.org, educators can download Internet Safety modules designed for various grades. They have materials designed for law enforcement as well, which we use. In addition, I know that DPI has developed instructional materials on Cyberbullying.

Simply put, the Internet is a powerful tool, whether the user intends good or ill. Increasingly, devastatingly, offenders use the Internet to victimize children. This victimization, in turn, can have severe effects. In the short-term, these can include behavioral problems, school performance issues, and a withdrawal from social and educational activities. If we can help kids avoid being victimized, we will protect their futures. We should do so.

2. When It Comes To School Safety, Share As Much Information As You Can With Law Enforcement

Second, I want to encourage all of you to consider developing information-sharing policies that enable you to share as much information as possible relating to safety issues with law enforcement.

Information-sharing is a key public safety tool. The contrary, information silos, are rightly seen as major impediments to school safety. In the school context, it is a lesson taught by Columbine, where confidentiality restrictions arguably impaired officials from sharing certain information with law enforcement about Eric Harris and Dylan Klebold before they took the lives of 13 innocent people. But when information *is* shared and incident response plans *are* executed – as at Green Bay East a few years ago – violence can be averted and kids can be protected.

To be sure, a maze of federal and state law places limits on what school districts may share with law enforcement. As Kevin St. John of the Department of Justice will discuss with you later, I've proposed legislation that will facilitate increased information-sharing between law enforcement and schools. The federal government, too, has eased limitations on information sharing.

I want to encourage you to share all that you can share with those who partner with you to protect the educational environment. This doesn't always happen, yet it only makes sense. You can't act on what you don't know, and decisionmakers make the best decisions when they have access to all of the information that is relevant.

3. Create A Law Enforcement Unit; Consider Using Police School Liaison Officers

Last, I want to encourage you to create a Law Enforcement Unit within your school district and encourage you to consider using police School Liaison Officers.

Law Enforcement Units are individuals authorized by a school board to (1) refer to appropriate authorities a matter for enforcement of any law or ordinance; or (2) maintain the physical security and safety of the school. These individuals do not have to be law enforcement officers; indeed, to the extent they are employees of the school district, they won't be law enforcement officers.

Properly used and staffed, a Law Enforcement Unit is an ideal place to gather information relating to potential risks to school safety, to analyze that information, to work with appropriate individuals to address problem situations, and to disseminate that information to the police. As Gary Hamblin of the Department of Justice and other presenters will discuss in more detail, one of the most significant tools a school district can employ to maintain safe schools is to funnel all information that relates to potential risks to a single source to analyze. This way, relevant information does not get ignored. When eight different people see eight independent events involving one student, it's just an "isolated incident." But when those "isolated incidents" are reported to a central source, patterns can be identified and educational plans or safety steps can be initiated to address the problem.

Law Enforcement Units have another side benefit. Their records are not subject to the same confidentiality restrictions as pupil records, meaning that information can be more readily shared with outside officials, such as police, who can assist you in maintaining safe schools. Our presenters will discuss this concept in more detail.

In addition to creating Law Enforcement Units, I think every school district should consider the appropriateness of using police School Liaison Officers. School Liaison Officers are law enforcement personnel who are assigned to the schools. These officers are employed by a sheriff's department or municipal police department, though are often funded in whole or in part by the school district. In concept, School Liaison Officers are a form of community policing, where law enforcement officers become a visible part of the community they patrol. So rather than having officers—often different personnel—periodically show up at a school as a stranger to serve a law enforcement function, School Liaison Officers become a known part of the school community.

This assists in maintaining a safe school environment and also adds to the mutual respect between students and law enforcement. By formalizing relationships between law enforcement and school districts, I also believe School Liaison Officers add to the shared respect between school officials and law enforcement, allowing them to have a better understanding of their organizations in their mutual effort to maintain a safe learning environment.

Functionally, School Liaison Officers can assist school administrators in the investigations of complaints concerning weapons violations, drug possession, and gang-related activity. Liaison officers can also provide schools with information on criminal, delinquency, and placement matters that occur off school property yet may very well affect the safety of the school or the educational plan for a given student.

I recognize that the needs of each community differ, and that School Liaison Officer programs may not be advisable for every school district. But for many communities, it is a successful way to enhance school safety and add to the respect between police, schools, and students.

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Once again, thank you for the invitation to speak today. I hope that you will consider the suggestions that I am offering. I believe they are common sense, effective measures to make schools safer.

I also want you to know that our involvement doesn't end with speeches and presentations. Please visit our website to access the Safe Schools Legal Resource Manual. If you have questions about today's presentation, I encourage you to reach out to the Department of Justice. We exist to assist.